



# RAISING GRANDCHILDREN? GET THE HELP YOU NEED!

Most parents find the daily joys and enduring satisfaction of raising children worth the sacrifices and hard work. Grandparents who are raising grandchildren get to enjoy the rewards as well, but they also face a number of unique challenges.

## THE FIRST CHALLENGE? JUST KEEPING UP!

At a time when most of their peers have put their parenting days behind them and are contemplating or living in retirement, approximately 2.4 million grandparent caregivers<sup>1</sup> in the United States are buying diapers, helping with homework and refereeing sibling arguments. As caregivers age and stamina decreases, just keeping up becomes more difficult.

## PAYING THE BILLS & JUMPING THROUGH HOOPS

Every parent faces challenges with healthcare, insurance, education, finances and all the practical aspects of raising safe, healthy children. For grandparent caregivers, these challenges are often compounded by financial difficulties and red tape.

Raising a child is expensive, and can be a financial burden for caregivers who are trying to manage on a limited or fixed income. Officially, 19 percent of grandparent caregivers are living in poverty.<sup>2</sup> Meanwhile, there are custody issues to contend with, adoption or legal guardianship issues to sort out, and plenty of associated red tape.

## EMOTIONAL HEALTH

Less tangible but of equal concern are the emotional health issues that arise. "I'm too old for this," is a common initial reaction, and it is often accompanied by deep feelings of anger, guilt, depression and/or resentment.

There are many circumstances that lead to grandparents raising grandchildren, including drug and alcohol problems, mental illness, incarceration, poverty and sometimes the death of one or both parents, so grandparent caregivers may be coping with whatever trauma led to their caregiver role in the first place. They must face their own grief or anger, and help the grandchild cope as well.

If the grandchild's parents have relinquished care due to substance abuse, or if they abused or neglected their children, the grandparents are likely to be angry at or disappointed in their grown children. They may also suffer from feelings of being failed parents themselves, and the children may have behavioral problems that stem from earlier trauma.

Grandparents who have put aside plans they'd made for later in life may feel depressed and wonder if they'll ever have the chance to fulfill their dreams. Whether they'd hoped to take up a new hobby, go back to school, or just live a slower, more relaxed life, making the sacrifices required of caregivers can be a serious blow to their satisfaction with life.

## HELP IS AVAILABLE – GET THE SUPPORT YOU NEED!

With all the challenges grandparent caregivers face, stress and depression are common. On the flip side, however, the difficulties of raising grandchildren are countered by the wonder and love children bring to their caregivers. With the right support, grandparent caregivers can achieve great happiness and grandparent-headed families can thrive.

There are more grandparents in the United States involved in their grandchildren's upbringing than ever before.<sup>3</sup> As a result, there are now more support groups, government assistance programs and community resources available. If you are a grandparent caregiver, contact your EAP for emotional health support and childcare resources, and look to AARP to get connected with state-specific resources.

## YOUR EAP

Your EAP is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, and includes counseling and work & life assistance at no charge to you. Telephonic and face-to-face counseling are available for:

- » Relationship, family and parenting issues
- » Stress and anxiety
- » Depression
- » Grief and loss
- » Substance abuse

Work & Life Services are available as well, and include childcare assistance. Childcare assistance can help you clarify your needs and access community and financial resources. You can obtain referrals to pre-screened childcare providers over the phone or online, and may also be entitled to help with adoption, special needs, educational matters and other parenting issues.

## AARP

You can call the AARP Grandparent Information Center toll-free at 1-888-687-2277 or visit the grandparenting section of their website ([www.aarp.org/grandparenting](http://www.aarp.org/grandparenting)), where you'll find excellent fact sheets that list programs in your state that can help you. Each fact sheet includes a section on public assistance that covers topics such as financial assistance, food stamps and health insurance.

*This article is for informational and self-help purposes only. It should not be treated as a substitute for financial, medical, psychiatric, psychological or behavioral healthcare advice, nor as a substitute for consultation with a qualified professional.*

### Get Help Anytime, Day or Night!

Your EAP includes telephonic and face-to-face counseling, as well as childcare resources. Open 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

**For more information, call**  
**(866) EAP-4SOC**  
**(866) 327-4762**  
TDD callers, please dial (800) 327-0801

**Or visit us online at:**  
**[www.eap4soc.mhn.com](http://www.eap4soc.mhn.com)**  
(register with the access code "SOC")

<sup>1,2</sup> "Grandparents Living With Grandchildren: 2000." Census 2000 Brief. Issued October 2003. Accessed online Sept. 25, 2006 at <http://www.census.gov/prod/2003pubs/c2kbr-31.pdf>. (The census report defines grandparent caregivers as "individuals with primary responsibility for their coresident grandchildren younger than 18.")

<sup>3</sup> AARP State Fact Sheet, California. July 2006. (Between 1990 and 2000, the number of grandparent-headed households in the U.S. increased by 30 percent.)